



UC Davis Provides Innovative Model for Students in International Agricultural Research

Working in collaboration with 18 universities, the University of California, Davis leads the [Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Collaborative Research on Horticulture](#), which builds international partnerships for fruit and vegetable research to improve livelihoods around the world.

Though the Horticulture Innovation Lab comprises a wide variety of projects directed by leading scientists, a small but important part of its portfolio is the [Trellis Fund](#), an innovative model that pairs U.S. graduate students with organizations engaged with local farmers in developing countries. With support from the Trellis Fund, students work as partners and consultants for these organizations to help address some of smallholder farmers' most pressing technical needs. For many students, a Trellis Fund project is their first opportunity to apply their agricultural research backgrounds to professional partnerships in international development.

"We've found that Trellis is a good opportunity for students to dip their toes into international development work," says Amanda Crump, associate director of the Horticulture Innovation Lab. "An important part of graduate school is conducting research and learning how to manage research, and Trellis is giving them out-of-classroom experience in an international setting."

The Trellis Fund not only gives graduate students valuable field opportunities in food security and development, but it is also managed by students who work for the Horticulture Innovation Lab and was originally proposed by a UC Davis student.

"I think we feel closer to the program because it is managed by our peers and for our peers," says Elana Peach-Fine, a UC Davis graduate student who most recently led Trellis management. "We put a lot of heart and soul into this program because we're responsible for it, and we believe in it."

Trellis Fund projects address topics ranging from pollination-friendly farming practices to postharvest training, with horticultural crops including everything from beets to mangos. One agricultural researcher, Rachel Suits, studied entomology (insect science) at North Carolina State University and traveled to Nepal to work on integrated pest management in vegetables. During her project, she collaborated with Nepal's Ecological Services Center to reduce pesticide use in vegetables.

"One thing that was really exciting about this program was the opportunity to be fully immersed in another culture and do something that was work-related in a different country," Suits says.

Building capacity is a central tenet of Trellis Fund projects, both for the organizations and for the students. This summer, Trellis kicked off 13 new projects on fruits and vegetables around the world and will send graduate students to Uganda, Kenya, Senegal, Ghana, Tanzania, Guatemala, Nepal and Bangladesh to work with a range of development organizations, farmer groups, national agricultural research organizations and local universities. This is the third round of such projects; over its lifetime, the Trellis Fund has supported 37 projects in 14 different countries.

"I hope the Trellis students have a very real experience working in international development," Peach-Fine says. "I hope they carry the sense with them that their work as agricultural researchers has the potential to be important to a global society."